INSIDE ISSUES . . . .

Issues for RHODE ISLAND MANAGEMENT

Published by The Rhode Island Division of Personnel Administration — April 1986

COMMUNICATIONS: An Essential Tool of Management

Part I of a four part series for public service managers on effectively communicating with employees.

In this era of communications satellites and computers, information has become an essential commodity to every type of government operation, as well as throughout the private sector. More and more often, operating efficiently hinges on management's ability to compile meaningful data, and to convey instructions quickly and accurately to lower-level supervisors and employees.

Complicating these increased communications demands is a change in the structure of the workforce itself: "average" public employees today, are no longer satisfied simply to be told what to do. Better educated and more aware than their forebears, they want reasons and explanations; they want to contribute ideas and ask questions; they are concerned about the personal and social implications of their work.

If you were organizing a new agency from scratch, what would you have to supply for your organization? First, of course, a building site with office space. Next, office furniture and office supplies, machines and various types of equipment to expedite your day-to-day activities. Finally, the manpower: employees to perform basic operations; managers to supervise; staff personnel to advise and evaluate; and officials to make operating and policy decisions. Now you would be ready to open your doors for business, right? Wrong.

Even with all these facilities and people, however, your new agency wouldn't be able to begin operating. What's lacking? A **communications system** — some means for management to make its decisions known; inform employees of the work that needs to be done; and tell them how to do it; and obtain sufficient information from employees to formulate workable plans and policies. Without this vital element, your organization would remain at a standstill.

No organization, of course, completely lacks a communications system. But many rely on hit-or-miss, haphazard communications methods that seriously impair both employees' and management's functioning. Vital information gets lost, because no one knows where it's supposed to go; essential communications channels are blocked, because responsibility for releasing or withholding information has not been clearly defined; employees become disgruntled, because they're not made or kept sufficiently aware that anyone's interested in them.

The solution: information system planning.

The agency that wants to avoid or correct such conditions must recognize one basic fact: **management-employee communication will not take care of itself.** Communications channels and methods must be carefully planned, from source to receiver, throughout all organizational levels.

Here are some pointers on establishing an effective information system for your agency. The proper functioning of each part of this system is vitally important, for your communications "chain" will be only as strong as its weakest link.

Controlling communciations.

There is a very simple reason why your agency's management must control the information flow to and from its employees: if management doesn't, someone else will. Rumor mongers and, frequently, vested interests are ready and willing to rush in and fill any information vacuum caused by supervisory neglect, or to "pump" unwary employees for information that should not be disclosed. The results, obviously, are not to management's advantage. How do you gain and maintain communications control? A combination of the following methods usually works best:

- **Be first with the most information.** Satisfy employees' curiosity and natural desire to know with a steady flow of information from management. Help them feel in on things by giving them important news first, before it's released to the public. When problems arise, make sure employees learn about them from **you**, not from an outside source.
- **Censor judiciously.** If you feel that it would be unwise to give employees certain types of information, see that **all** managers

(Turn to Page 2)

Study Finds "Gender Bias" in R.I. Courtrooms

A study group appointed to study how women are treated in the state's courtrooms has determined that "gender bias" — the predisposition to treat a person according to sex stereotypes — is alive and well in Rhode Island courts.

The study was commissioned by a committee appointed by the R.I. Supreme Court. The committee is headed by Superior Court Judge Corinne P. Grande, and the study was conducted by social scientist Dr. Sally E. Findley.

After spending the equivalent of one-and-one-half workweeks observing procedures in the various state courts and later studying 488 cases, the study group concluded that "gender bias" is a problem not just for female lawyers who now constitute 14 percent of the Rhode Island Bar, but also for female plaintiffs and defendants in criminal and civil cases. Lest she be accused herself of being biased towards the plight of women in the courts, Dr. Findley quickly added that there are also some situations to which "men are disadvantaged relative to women."

In her preliminary report, Dr. Findley concluded that there are "several aspects of courtroom interactions in which women appear to be treated differently or are subject to different behavioral expectations simply because they are women. As a result, gender alone may disadvantage a litigant or defendant."

In the next study phase, the committee will solicit comments from participants in courts concerning their personal experiences with gender bias, or with examples of gender bias they may have observed.

Discretionary Effort in the Workplace — Part II

A Three Part Series on the Changing Status of the American Work Ethic.

Part II discusses management's role in controlling discretionary effort.

Synopsis of Part I (ISSUES, December, 1985). In Part I, the discretionary work effort was defined by drawing a parallel between discretionary income (the part of one's income that remains after taxes and other fixed and necessary expenses), and discretionary work effort (the **difference** between the **maximum** amount of effort that can be brought to a job and the **minimum** amount of effort required to avoid being fired or penalized).

Changes in the composition of the present-day workforce were studied, and the role played by new technologies in shaping those changes was examined. The major shifts in type of jobs currently held by Americans (away from blue-collar and manufacturing, towards white-collar and service jobs) were explored, and high discretion and low discretion jobs identified.

Because of a widespread "commitment gap", many high-discretion jobholders are, by their own admission, holding back effort from their jobs, giving less than they are capable of giving, and less than they are, in principle, willing to give.

The growth of discretion in the workplace reduces the control that managers and employers exercise (particularly over the quality of output) and puts it into the hands of individual job-holders. But quality calls for commitment, and commitment to the job has not kept pace with the increases in discretionary effort. As a result, many jobholders are holding back from their jobs, and quality suffers accordingly. In short, our human resources are not being deployed efficiently: precisely at a time when we need to perform at peak ability (in order to compete in the world market), we are being mindlessly wasteful of our most important asset — the capacities of our people.

A survey has found that fewer than one out of four jobholders (23%) say that they are currently working at their full potential. Nearly half of all jobholders (44%) say that they do not put much effort into their jobs over and above what is required to hold on to a job. The overwhelming majority (75%) say that they could be significantly more effective on their jobs than they are now.

Even more disturbing is the possibility that the tendency to withhold effort from the job may be increasing. Close to six out of ten working Americans (62%) believe that "most people do not work as hard as they used to." A number of observers have pointed out that a considerable gap has existed between the number of hours that people are paid for working and the number of hours that they actually spend in productive labor. There is now evidence that the gap is widening. One study conducted by the University of Michigan found that the difference between paid hours and actual working hours grew by 10% over a ten year period.

This commitment gap has surfaced at a time when America is struggling to maintain its economic vitality in an intensely competitive world economic marketplace.

From the point of view of the country's economic needs, this commitment gap has surfaced at the worst possible time. After nearly three decades of sustained growth, America's economic machine seems to be slowing down. The symptoms are both familiar and disturbing. Unemployment continues at an unacceptable level, the growth in our standard of living has leveled off (and declined for some groups), and the nation is experiencing severe deficits in its budget and balance of trade, as well as renewed calls for protectionism.

At a superficial level these economic difficulties appear symptomatic of boom-bust-recession cyclical changes that take place periodically. But its severity reflects the fact that the U.S. economy is suffering from a deeper and more serious difficulty than the downside of a normal business cycle. There is a growing recognition that the economy is also facing a decline in the competitive vitality of some of its key industries. Even as we recover from periodic recession-induced declines, we find ourselves confronting a world economic marketplace where we are far less competitive than in the past.

In part, the problem is also due to a long term slowdown in our rate of productivity growth. After a steady productivity growth rate of over 3% per year for nearly a quarter century, growth rates have fallen gradually to unacceptable levels. During the decades of sustained affluence, many Americans began to take for granted the idea that competitive superiority was somehow an American birthright, guaranteed to us automatically without any special need for sacrifice or effort. To a limited degree our economic difficulties are an outgrowth of this attitude.

But in larger part the problem is not that we have done a poor job, but rather that others, especially Japan, have done an outstanding job. Japan and several other industrialized economies have captured and continue to capture, increasingly large shares of world markets for high-technology products. At the same time, developing economies such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea, and Malaysia are increasing their share of the market in less complex industries such as small appliances, nonspecialty steel, and shipbuilding.

More vigorous world competition combined with a slowdown in domestic productivity growth rates means that America cannot expect to maintain its standard of living without making major changes. As economist Penitt J. K. Kouri puts it: "There are only two options: One is to adjust and move forward, and the other is not to adjust and move backwards . . . The option of status quo is simply not available."

Many of the jobs now being lost will not automatically be restored by increased consumer spending. Even when more Americans are buying automobiles, for example, American auto-workers will not go back to work if Japanese cars continue to attract consumers because they are lower-priced and better made than American cars. If America is to restore a high level of employment, a rising standard of living, and renewed leadership in the world economy, major steps must be taken to restore the country's competitive vitality.

In the next Issues . . .

"The American work ethic; how healthy is it?"

This series is based on a report "Putting the Work Ethic to Work — a Public Agenda Report on Restoring America's Competitive Vitality," by Daniel Yankelovich and John Immerwahr, The Public Agenda Foundation, Washington, D.C.

(Continued from page 1)

responsible for withholding these facts are clearly aware of this need. Don't risk leaks by assuming that they'll know what not to say. And always be ready to give employees who may ask about censored information a sound reason why it can't be passed on.

- **Tell employees what to keep under their hats.** Most employees will willingly guard confidential information involved in their work **if they know what shouldn't be disclosed, and why.** Be explicit about the problem of snooping.
- **Be willing to listen.** Employees who have suggestions, ideas, or gripes should tell them to management — not to other employees. And they will, if they're given the chance. Establish good **upward** communications channels, and keep them constantly open. Next time in ISSUES, Part II of Communications — a look at communications in three dimensions — the transmission of information **up, down,** and **horizontally!**

ISSUES is published four times a year by the Division of Personnel Administration, Department of Administration, 289 Promenade Street, Providence, R.I. 02908

Director of Administration:
Frederick Lippitt

Assistant Director of Administration/Employee Relations:
Earl J. Croft, Jr.

Personnel Administrator:
Bradford E. Southworth

Editor:
Donald J. Boisvert

WHAT TYPE OF MANAGER ARE YOU? PEOPLE ORIENTED? TASK ORIENTED? OR BOTH?

This self-test will give you the answer. Circle one answer — indicating the way you most likely would behave in the described circumstances:

(A)=Always (F)=Frequently (O)=Occasionally (S)=Seldom (N)=Never

1. A F O S N I would most likely act as the spokesman of the group.
2. A F O S N I would encourage overtime work.
3. A F O S N I would allow members complete freedom in their work.
4. A F O S N I would encourage the use of uniform procedures.
5. A F O S N I would permit the members to use their own judgement in solving problems.
6. A F O S N I would stress being ahead of competing groups.
7. A F O S N I would speak as a representative of the group.
8. A F O S N I would needle members for greater effort.
9. A F O S N I would try out my ideas in the group.
10. A F O S N I would let the members do their work the way they think best.
11. A F O S N I would be working hard for a promotion.
12. A F O S N I would tolerate postponement and uncertainty.
13. A F O S N I would speak for the group if there were visitors present.
14. A F O S N I would keep the work moving at a rapid pace.
15. A F O S N I would turn the members loose on a job and let them go to it.
16. A F O S N I would settle conflicts when they occur in the group.
17. A F O S N I would get swamped by details.
18. A F O S N I would represent the group at outside meetings.
19. A F O S N I would be reluctant to allow any members any freedom of action.
20. A F O S N I would decide what should be done and how it should be done.
21. A F O S N I would push for increased production.
22. A F O S N I would let some members have authority which I could keep.
23. A F O S N Things would usually turn out as I had predicted.
24. A F O S N I would allow the group a high degree of initiative.
25. A F O S N I would assign group members to particular tasks.
26. A F O S N I would be willing to make changes.
27. A F O S N I would ask the members to work harder.
28. A F O S N I would trust the group members to exercise good judgement.
29. A F O S N I would schedule the work to be done.
30. A F O S N I would refuse to explain my actions.
31. A F O S N I would persuade others that my ideas are to their advantage.
32. A F O S N I would permit the group to set its own pace.
33. A F O S N I would urge the group to beat its previous record.
34. A F O S N I would act without consulting the group.
35. A F O S N I would ask that group members follow standard rules and regulations.

YOUR SCORE. Task _____ People _____

Our thanks to Deborah A. Dallaire of the state Motor Vehicle Dealers' License Commission for the manager's test material. (Ed.)

SCORING THE T-P QUESTIONNAIRE

To score your responses, follow these directions:

1. Circle the item number for items 8, 12, 17, 18, 19, 30, 34, and 35.
2. Write the number 1 in front of a circled item number if you responded **S** (seldom) or **N** (never) to that item.
3. Also write a number 1 in front of item numbers **not** circled if you responded **A** (always) or **F** (frequently).
4. Circle the number 1's which you have written in front of the following items: 3, 5, 8, 10, 15, 18, 19, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, and 35.
5. Count the circled number 1's. This is your score for concern for **people**. Record the score in the blank following the work "people".
6. Count the **uncircled** number 1's. This is your score for concern for **task**. Record this number in the blank following the work "task".
7. Now measure your scores against the chart on p. 4.

Tips for Successful Goal Setting

Take the SMAC Test

Goal setting is a simple but effective way to form a bridge for communications between employees and supervisors, as well as to help define job responsibilities, assign work priorities, and clear up uncertainties. Here are some tips on how to set goals effectively.

Define the type of goal. — Goals usually fall into one of the following categories:

- A personal goal can be job-related — for example, working toward a promotion by getting more training or experience.
- Routine goals can include handling paperwork more effectively or answering inquiries more efficiently. It's important to allow time to fulfill the routine aspects of the job.
- Problem-solving goals aim at correcting a particular problem. BUT, if you try to solve a problem but don't succeed, don't penalize yourself. It means you tried to do something extra, and your efforts should be appreciated and recognized.
- Innovative goals involve trying something new to improve results. These goals should help to better the department's or the individual employee's performance.

Goal setting guidelines. — To set goals, first write them down. In describing them, use an action verb (such as "develop," "plan," "inspect") to plan how to reach a desired result and set a target date. Then break these goals into smaller segments. For example, you can split one-year goals into quarterly goals, or quarterly goals into one-month goals.

Putting the principles into practice. — Here is how the plan works. Suppose a locomotive engineer's goal is to reduce fuel consumption by 10% per year by improving train-handling techniques. This is a big goal, but by breaking it down into a step-by-step action plan, it becomes more manageable. The action plan should include evaluation methods, review dates, potential obstacles, and sources of help.

The engineer's first step might be to spend one hour each day for a month learning fuel efficiency train-handling techniques from a supervisor, co-worker, book, or class. The next step might be to practice these techniques for the next two months, while recording or comparing fuel consumption. If the records show a decrease in fuel consumption, the third step might be for the engineer to practice the techniques until he (or she) becomes comfortable with them. As the engineer works toward his goal, he reviews progress monthly. When a problem arises, he gets advise from a supervisor.

Take the SMAC test. — When setting your goals, make sure they are specific, measurable, achievable, and compatible with your job. You can do this by asking yourself the following questions, known as the SMAC test.

- Is the goal **Specific?** Does it include specific changes, improvements, or outcomes? Don't be vague.
- Is it **Measureable?** If you can't quantify it, the goal will be difficult to monitor.
- Is it **Compatible?** Your goals should be compatible with those of the department or agency. If they're not, you'll meet with resistance that will make them hard to accomplish.

Personnel Administrator Appointed by National Association

Personnel Administrator Bradford E. Southworth has been appointed Member at Large by the National Association of State Personnel Executives, to serve the unexpired term of Charles Walters of California. Brad is expected to be re-appointed to a full 3-year term at the organization's annual meeting in September in Seattle, Washington.

(Continued from page 3)

SHARED LEADERSHIP RESULTS FROM BALANCING CONCERN FOR TASK AND CONCERN FOR PEOPLE